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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence Memorandum

*Recent Communist Logistical and Manpower
Developments in Indochina*

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
20 March 1973

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

RECENT COMMUNIST LOGISTICAL
AND MANPOWER DEVELOPMENTS IN INDOCHINA

SUMMARY

1. During the past week, no new infiltration of infantry troops from North Vietnam was detected starting south, nor have there been any detections of redeployments of major Communist units into or out of South Vietnam or Laos. Logistic movement in southern North Vietnam remained well below that of the pre-cease-fire period, and there was some decline in the level of Communist supply movements into southern Laos. But logistical activity within Laos and into and within South Vietnam remained at very high levels. This pattern is consistent with that of previous years, and therefore we cannot make a firm judgment at this time as to whether the apparent slackening of logistic effort in some areas is connected with the cease-fire.

- In southern Laos, a "General Transportation Offensive" emphasizing supply movements into South Vietnam began on 15 March to extend through May.
- In Quang Tri Province, over 1,500 tons of supplies, much of which probably came into the country via the DMZ, were moved by logistic elements during the week. Supplies continue to move across the Laos and Cambodia borders into southern South Vietnam.
- New road construction along the South Vietnam/Laos border will, when completed, improve the Communists' capability to resupply forces in Military Regions (MRs) 1 and 2 during the summer months.

Note: Comments and queries regarding this publication are welcomed. They may be directed to [] of the Office of Economic Research,

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SPECIAL NOTE

Very late evidence indicates that 16 special-purpose infiltration groups moved through Binh Tram 18 on 19 March. The detection of these groups – with a total strength of more than 400 – marks the first time in more than two weeks that either regular or special-purpose groups have been noted entering the pipeline in North Vietnam. As a result of these detections, the number of personnel departing North Vietnam since the cease-fire is now estimated at about 10,500.

DISCUSSION

Recent Communist Logistical Developments in Indochina

Logistical Activity in South Vietnam

2. During the past week or so, Communist vehicle activity in Quang Tri Province was at a record high. One NVA element in the northeastern sector of the province reported on 15 March that it had "handled" 2,450 vehicles during the preceding seven days, and another, probably in the same general area, handled 667 vehicles. Taking into account the possibility that some of the vehicles were counted twice, we still estimate that at least 1,500 tons of supplies could have been moved in Quang Tri Province by these vehicles during the week.¹ Much of it likely represents supplies moved into Quang Tri from across the DMZ. This rate of delivery - 200 tons daily - represents movements of two to three times the Communists' daily resupply requirements that must be met from outside South Vietnam and makes it clear that supplies are being stockpiled.²

3. There is other evidence that supplies are continuing to transit the DMZ for destinations in northern South Vietnam. Recent aerial photography showed large stacks of supplies near Con Thien, on the southern edge of the DMZ. [redacted] photography revealed that Routes 6086 and 6089, which lead south from the western end of the DMZ, are in good condition and supporting moderate to heavy levels of traffic. Similarly, resupply from southern Laos into Quang Tri Province is continuing. Route 9, both east and west of Khe Sanh, shows evidence of sustained traffic. Photography [redacted] revealed, along Route 9, numerous stacks of supplies and about 55 trucks carrying petroleum products and other supplies. Photography has also indicated continuing resupply activity around Cam Lo, a major Communist logistics depot on Route 9, and that a former allied airfield near Route 9 some 10 miles northeast of Khe Sanh is being used as a major North Vietnamese logistics base. At the latter area, supplies line the runway, and large open storage areas are located along service roads. North Vietnamese communications have reflected concern over the arrival of a team from the "International Delegation" along their resupply corridors. On 14 March an element of Binh Tram 12 was ordered to "tell the troops to scatter and camouflage the cargo" because the delegation would be checking along Route 9.

1. As reported last week, on 8 March an NVA transportation unit in Quang Tri disclosed that it had handled 2,865 vehicles, including about 700 transport vehicles, a report which we thought constituted a monthly wrapup. It now appears more likely that last week's report covered only the period 1 to 7 March.

2. This judgment includes an allowance for ammunition based on the actual rate of current expenditures, without regard for the specific terms of the cease-fire agreement.



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4. Communist troops around Quang Tri City have also been engaged in logistics activity. On 11 March two regiments of the 325th NVA Division, now entrenched several miles southwest of the city, were directed to ensure that they had sufficient ammunition on hand so that "response to fire orders will be immediate." Another element of the 325th Division was ordered to recheck its quantity of 120-mm and 160-mm mortar ammunition. These heavy mortars have not been used extensively in past fighting in South Vietnam, and additional weapons may have been newly introduced, improving the Communists' fire power there.

5. Meanwhile, resupply activity continues along the major east-west corridors leading into central MR 1 from Laos. In Thua Thien Province, traffic levels have heightened on routes leading into and east from Communist storage bases in the A Shau Valley. Heavy traffic has been noted on Route 534 through northern Quang Tin Province, while in Quang Ngai Province the Viet Cong have sharply increased their recruitment of local laborers for transportation and construction chores.

6. Important roadbuilding activity has been noted in recent photography, and it appears that the Communists are moving to create a substantial year-round resupply capability for most of MRs 1 and 2. South of Khe Sanh, Communist construction crews have upgraded the road system leading south along the Laos/South Vietnam border, and in western Quang Nam Province, Route 614 was recently extended 4 miles to a point only 10 miles from Route 14. With the joining of Route 14 to Route 614, North Vietnam could move troops and supplies directly to Communist forces in the Central Highlands via routes inside South Vietnam, unaffected by the summer monsoon rains in Laos and Cambodia.

7. A recent COSVN directive stated that "we are continuing to strengthen our main forces with the tanks, guns, and troops that North Vietnam has sent us so that when the enemies rekindle the war we will be strong enough to stop them and maintain the limits of the cease-fire agreement." In this connection, [redacted]

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[redacted] the Communists are moving 35 to 40 tons of supplies daily into storage areas in Tay Ninh and Binh Long. Aerial reconnaissance during the second week of March showed that numerous truck convoys are continuing to move from Cambodian border base areas into northern Tay Ninh and Binh Long Provinces. Some were towing antiaircraft artillery (AAA) guns and heavy artillery.

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8. Finally, in MR 4 the Communists reportedly plan to continue using the Seven Mountains corridor from the Cambodian border bases into the Delta. The Viet Cong have been ordered to maintain control "at all costs" of the key mountain complex. The North Vietnamese have recently increased supply infiltration into that area, and recent artillery

emplacements around the Seven Mountains complex have bolstered Communist defenses there. Along the nearby Cambodian border the Communists have recently built up stockpiles opposite Kien Phong Province in preparation for further supply infiltration into MR 4.

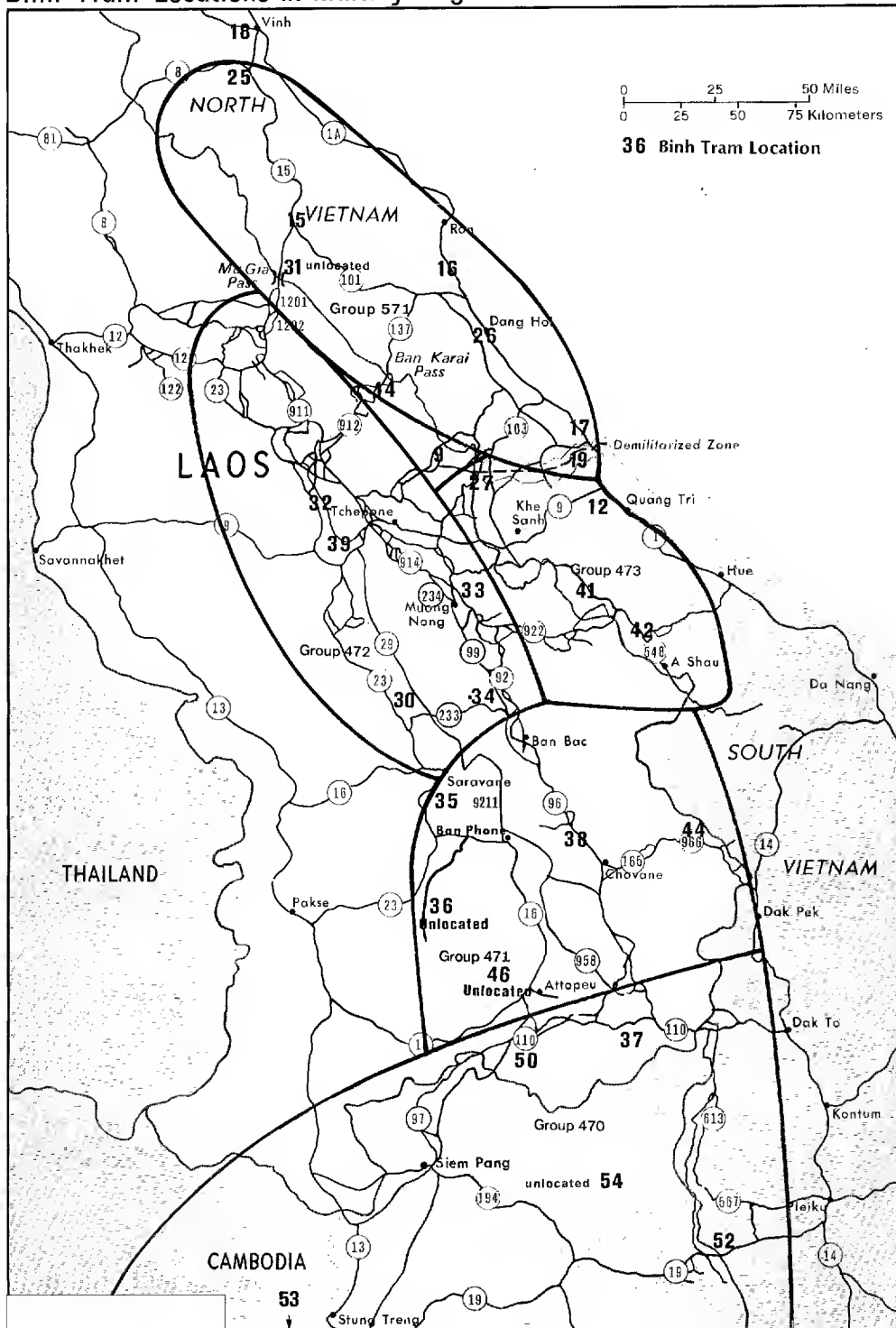
Logistical Activity in Laos and Cambodia

9. North Vietnam's dry season transportation campaign has entered a new phase, scheduled to last from 15 March through 31 May. Its prime focus is to be the delivery of supplies south through the Laotian corridor and into South Vietnam. Roads and bridges are being upgraded to ensure the success of this "large transportation effort." The importance of the effort is underscored by the establishment - by Group 472 - of a Forward Headquarters just north of Ban Bac. The new element will probably be charged with overseeing supply deliveries and coordinating activity with Group 471 to its south.

10. This new drive represents the third phase of the North Vietnamese "General Transportation Offensive." From October through January the emphasis was on moving supplies through the North Vietnamese Panhandle. By February the emphasis had shifted to the corridors leading into Laos, primarily through the Ban Karai Pass and the input roads west of the DMZ. Currently the overall level of detected activity has ebbed on the entry corridors and emphasis is to be placed on moving supplies closer to their final destinations. The pattern is typical of that exhibited in past years: the locus of Communist supply activity moves progressively south as the dry season grinds on. Reasonably favorable weather conditions generally prevail over Laos until at least late May, and with no international supervisory teams in place and no US bombing the pace of logistical activity can be expected to be brisk.

11. As mentioned, the second phase of the dry season effort centered on the entry corridors to southern Laos. More evidence of the magnitude of this effort was gleaned from a 12 March intercept from Binh Tram 14 which revealed that from 1 February through 9 March over 2,300 vehicles were involved in moving cargo from storage in Quang Binh Province to various storage and transshipment points in the northern Laotian Panhandle. The vehicles could easily have delivered some 9,000 tons of cargo - an average of over 240 tons per day. That rate of delivery through Ban Karai alone is comparable to any extended period during the war. No details of the cargo deliveries were given; however, an earlier intercept discussing deliveries during 1-22 February had shown about 60% rice and 30% ordnance moving. Deliveries during the remainder of the period were likely of similar proportions.

Binh Tram Locations in Military Region 559



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12. Since 1 March, [] a considerable decline of southbound activity through Ban Karai and [] a significant northbound bias. []

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[] it appears that there has been some drop off in the level of activity. In large part this represents the normal dry season shift in emphasis from input to Laos to southward movements of supplies already in Laos. Between 12 and 18 March an average of 22 trucks daily were detected moving south from Ban Karai, while a daily average of 7 trucks persisted on Route 1033 west of the DMZ.

13. In the area controlled by Group 472, heavy vehicle activity was reflected even before the new transportation phase was kicked off on 15 March. On 12 March, for example, Binh Tram 34 reported that numerous vehicles were active in its area. The binh tram reported the transportation of weapons, explosives, gasoline, oil, dry provisions, and foodstuffs. Other elements in the Group 472 area were also active during the week; over 100 vehicles moved within the area on 10 March; between 11 and 13 March, a 45-vehicle convoy was on the move to Group 471, a 19-vehicle convoy was en route to Saravane, and at least 150 additional vehicles were dispatched to unidentified destinations. On 13 March, Binh Tram 9, which operates west of the DMZ, dispatched a group of vehicles for the B-3 Front.

14. In the Group 473 area a 13 March intercept noted that forces at a storage area (possibly near Route 922 or A Chau) were unloading cargo very rapidly and that on the previous day the unloading of nearly 100 vehicles had been completed. An intercept the next day revealed that ordnance may make up a significant portion of the supplies moving toward South Vietnam's MR 1: of about 120 tons of supplies listed, 50 comprised ammunition. More ordnance was noted on the move, possibly on Route 548 inside South Vietnam, in a 17 March report from Group 473. Photography from the Group 473 area showed that Routes 925, 926, and 922, three main corridors into MR 1, were all supporting vehicle traffic.

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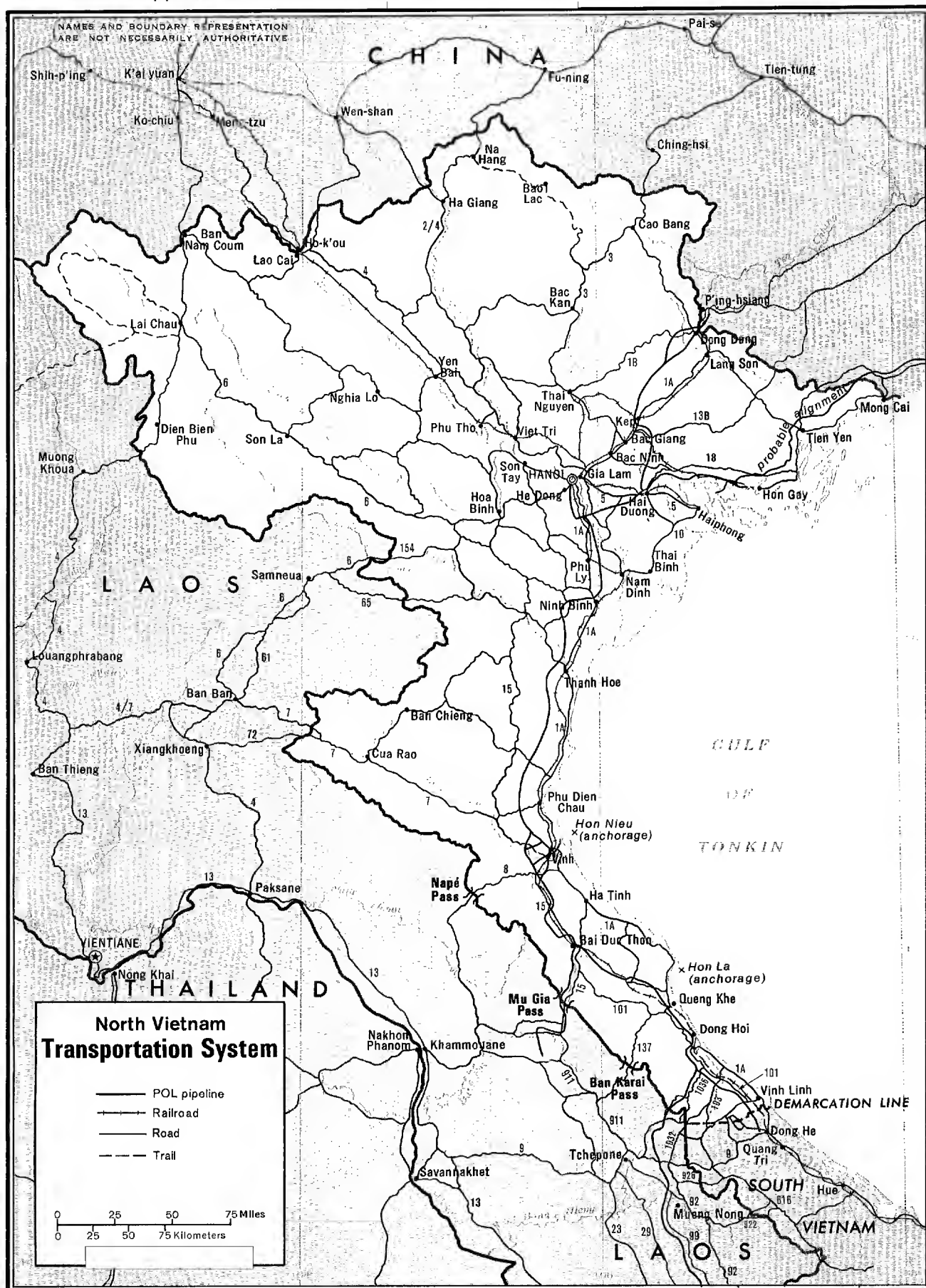
15. Farther south, very heavy vehicle activity has been detected in COMINT from the tri-border area of Laos, Cambodia, and South Vietnam. On 17 March, for example, Group 470 revealed that a Binh Tram -- probably 37 -- had received 49 vehicles since the previous day and was expecting 20 more that day. The vehicles could be carrying over 250 tons of cargo, probably destined for southern South Vietnam. In northeastern Cambodia, a 16 March intercept revealed that vehicles are moving supplies toward the battlefields and returning carrying wounded personnel. The intercept indicated that at least 88 vehicles had been dispatched carrying unspecified types of cargo. It appears that at least part of the supply activity consisted of deliveries of rice from Cambodia for use in southern Laos or for transshipment into the B-3 Front.

16. In eastern Cambodia, [] aerial reconnaissance associated with recently stepped up tactical air strikes against logistical targets have disclosed that the major lines of communication are supporting sustained heavy Communist use. Supply movements across the Laos/Cambodian border are both by truck and by boat. Cross-border Route 97/975 is in excellent condition, with numerous truck parks and storage points dotting its length. Although the route was constructed under dense tree cover, pilots were able to spot trucks on the road and stacks of supplies, including explosive cargo at points alongside the roadbed. The Tonle Kong River, which parallels Route 97/975, is showing surprisingly heavy use compared with this stage of past dry seasons when low water levels and hazards precluded the route's use. COMINT recently revealed that such problem areas were being successfully navigated, and on 9 and 10 March, at least 11 cargo-carrying boats were sighted between Siem Pang and Stung Treng. Near Stung Treng the flow of road and river traffic splits, a large percentage turning east onto Route 19 toward South Vietnam and the remainder proceeding south. This activity is continuing both day and night.

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Logistical Developments in Southern North Vietnam

17. Logistical activity in the North Vietnam Panhandle continues to be noted -- however, at a pace well below that of the pre-cease-fire period. The bulk of deliveries detected in Binh Tram 18 communications during the past week were destined for northern Laos. On 15 March, for example, an element of the Binh Tram noted that over 100 tons of foodstuffs had been delivered out Route 7 for northern Laos. Some 400 tons of food and fuel were remaining at the rail station near Route 7 to be delivered there. Other cargo -- including 27 vehicle loads on 16 March -- is arriving in the Binh Tram 18 area by truck, as are "combat vehicles" from the north, while barges are apparently being used to continue its movement southward.



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18. Activity continues to be reflected in communications farther south. On 13 March a Binh Tram 26 element reported that all bridges and ferries were secure and that at least 32 vehicles had transited its area. Binh Tram 26 was also involved in a beautification campaign to accommodate special visitors transiting its area during the week. (Collateral reporting revealed that a delegation from a Soviet tourism association recently visited Quang Binh Province to look over the area as a possible tourist attraction.) Route 103, which runs into the DMZ, was to be checked, bridges repaired, and litter cleaned up. Supplies were to be stored neatly along the river banks, in an obvious effort to impress the distinguished visitors.

Recent Manpower Developments in Indochina

Personnel Infiltration

19. No evidence has been received of additional North Vietnamese infantry troops entering the infiltration pipeline in North Vietnam during the past week. Moreover, initial detections of both regular and special-purpose infiltration groups already in the pipeline have tapered off somewhat. A total of five regular and four special-purpose groups appeared in COMINT for the first time during the past week, but of the regular groups, three had previously been gap-filled and do not add to the overall estimate of infiltration starts. The detection in southern Laos of the other two regular groups resulted in an increase of 2,000 in our infiltration estimate. Currently, there are more than 20,000 personnel in the infiltration pipeline, of whom about one-half are estimated to have departed North Vietnam after the cease-fire date. Since 28 January, more than 13,000 infiltrators are estimated to have arrived at their destinations in South Vietnam, Cambodia, and southern Laos.

20. As shown in the table, infiltration starts thus far in the dry season are running slightly behind the level for the comparable period a year ago. If Hanoi has in fact slowed the pace of infiltration starts, the difference in the two years' totals shown below will increase in the next several weeks.

Infiltration Starts

| <i>Destination</i> | <i>1 Sep 72 - 19 Mar 73</i> | <i>1 Sep 71 - 19 Mar 72</i> |
|----------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Total | 86,500 | 91,500 |
| MR Tri-Thien-Hue | 26,000 | 13,500 |
| MR 5 | 9,000 | 17,000 |
| B-3 Front | 14,000 | 22,000 |
| COSVN | 26,500 | 31,000 |
| Southern Laos/MR 559 | 11,000 | 8,000 |

Communist and South Vietnamese Regular Combat Forces in South Vietnam

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South Vietnam

Regular Combat Forces

VC/NVA¹ RVNAF²

160,000 279,000

VC/NVA RVNAF

82,000 62,000

325th VNMC
324B Airborne
320B 1st
312th 2nd
308th 3rd
304th Regional
711th Forces
2nd

VC/NVA RVNAF

25,000 60,000

320th 23rd
10th 22nd
3rd Regional
Forces

VC/NVA RVNAF

26,000 70,000

429th Sapper
Command
9th
7th

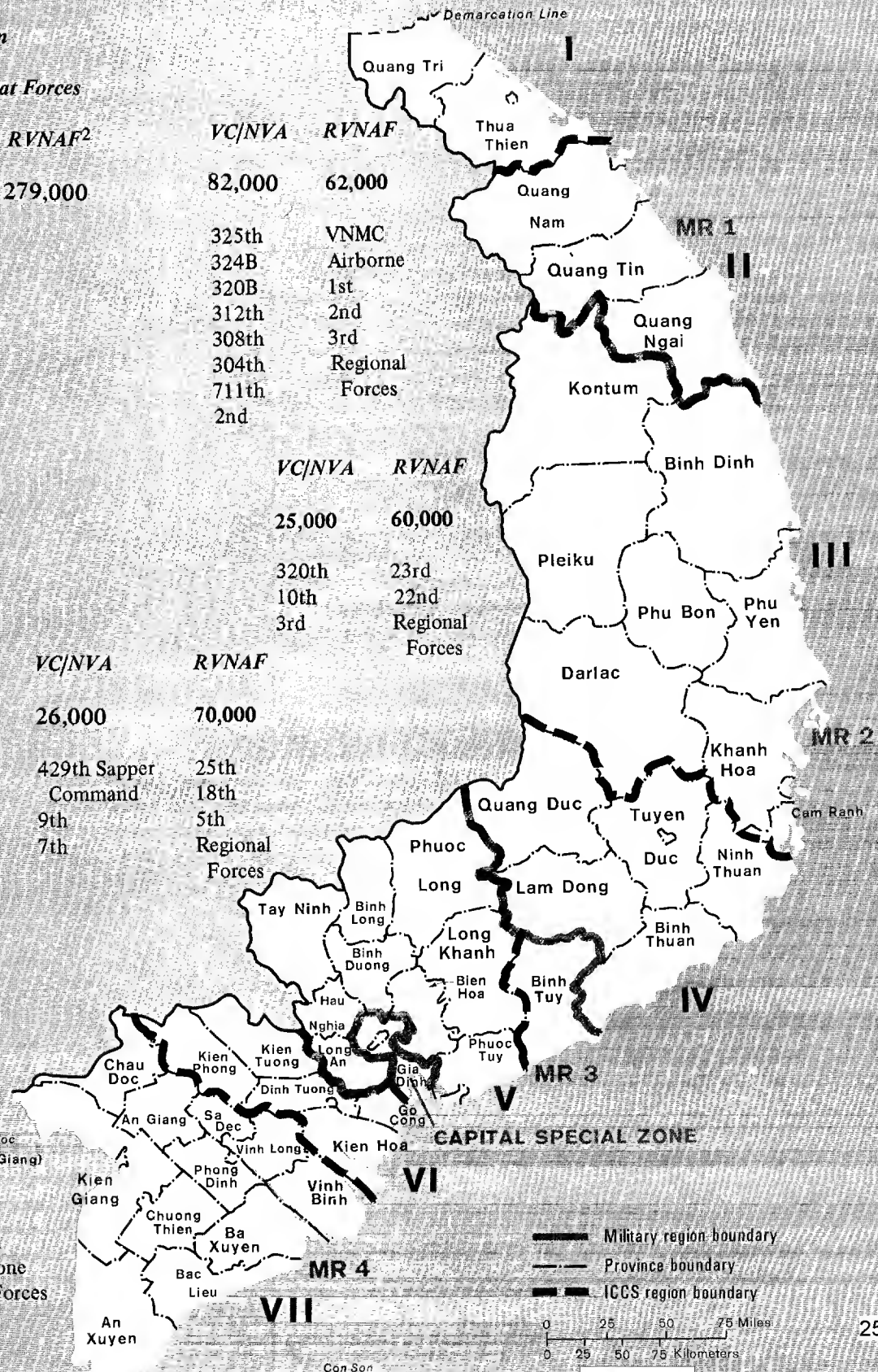
25th
18th
5th
Regional
Forces

VC/NVA RVNAF

27,000 87,000

6th
5th
1st

21st
9th
7th
44th Special
Tactical Zone
Regional Forces



1. Includes VC/NVA personnel in combat and combat support units and local force companies and platoons.
2. Includes RVNAF personnel in combat, combat support, and regional force units.

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VC/NVA Redeployments in South Vietnam

21. No redeployments of major Communist units into or out of South Vietnam were detected during the past week. Units in-country remain in a defensive posture, engaged primarily in training, resting, and refitting.

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[redacted] the 324B NVA Infantry Division is scheduled to withdraw from Thua Thien Province to Quang Tri Province in GVN MR 1 in the immediate future. Although the purpose of the redeployment was not indicated, the division has been engaged in heavy combat since early last year and is in need of major refitting. On the other hand, the move could be indicative of a change in the division's area of operations. Despite the withdrawal of the division from Thua Thien Province, Communist combat strength in the province reportedly will not be allowed to decline. Experienced company-level officers and political officers of the division are to remain behind in order to receive new replacements and an unidentified number of new units, possibly North Vietnamese infiltrators scheduled to arrive from the north during the next two weeks.

Manpower Developments in Laos

22. No major redeployments of enemy units into or out of Laos were noted during the past week. Within southern Laos, however, the 42nd Battalion of the 972nd NVA Front relocated nearly 40 miles northward from its traditional area of operations in the Thakhek-Mahaxai area. There is no confirming evidence that either the battalion or any other NVA unit currently is redeploying to North Vietnam.

23. The existence of two new logistical units also was revealed during the past week. On 3 March the presence of a 29th Engineer Regiment in Group 473's area was disclosed. Its subordinates and area of operations remain undefined. The 3 March message also revealed that a previously unidentified subordinate of Group 473 is the 39th Engineer Regiment. No specific reference was made to the 39th Regiment's area of responsibility, but it too probably operates in the Group 473 area. These two regiments were probably formed in Laos from existing units prior to the cease-fire. Their establishment is one of a series of recent adjustments made to the North Vietnamese logistics system in southern Laos, and reaffirms at least the near-term commitment of the Communists to the system.

Manpower Developments in North Vietnam

24. Two subordinates of the North Vietnamese Armor Command were located by direction finding in Quang Binh Province on 12 March, considerably southeast of their 7 February locations in Nghe An and Ha

Tinh Provinces, respectively. The identity, composition, and final destination of these subordinates are presently unknown, but the move to Quang Binh Province may reflect the establishment of a controlling authority of the Armor Command, which is responsible for the tanks which deployed to the south this dry season. Alternatively, these armor subordinates could be new tank groups destined to deploy south from North Vietnam.

Current Deployment of North Vietnam's Air Defense Units

25. A recent community evaluation of the North Vietnamese air defense posture reveals that 57% of Hanoi's known AAA regiments are currently in southern North Vietnam, northern South Vietnam, and southern Laos: eight are operating in Quang Binh Province, North Vietnam; 13 in Quang Tri Province, South Vietnam; and seven are active in the Laos Panhandle.⁴ These 28 regiments, with 112 AAA battalions, represent an increase over the previous high observed in May 1972, when elements of 25 AAA regiments, with 86 battalions, were active in these areas.⁵ Highlighting this buildup of forces has been the movement of nine regiments from northern North Vietnam and northern Laos to the southern areas since September 1972. Furthermore, there are indications that additional AAA units (the 225th and 256th Regiments) may soon deploy from the Hanoi area to Quang Binh Province.

26. The exact purpose for the present buildup of air defense forces and the apparent North Vietnamese intention to augment it further with more AAA units is still unclear. However, a major North Vietnamese air defense complex has been established in western Quang Tri Province with five air defense regiments now encircling the Khe Sanh area. The Communists may wish to combine their diverse headquarters entities in northern South Vietnam -- both party and military -- into an area that controls major east-west and north-south land routes plus an airfield. In addition, elements of at least seven other AAA regiments are apparently in the process of repositioning within the province.

4. In addition to these 28 regiments of North Vietnam's Air Defense Command, there are three GDRS AAA support regiments -- two in Quang Tri, South Vietnam, and one in southern Laos.

5. The comparative distribution of battalions for the two periods is as follows:

| | <i>May 1972</i> | <i>Mar 1973</i> |
|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Total | 86 | 112 |
| Quang Binh | 29 | 27 |
| Quang Tri | 33 | 56 |
| Southern Laos | 24 | 29 |

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